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Re: <https://www.notlmuseum.ca/research/british-home-children>

### **Compiler's Notes (Oct 2021):**

In 1867 Maria S. Rye started communicating with Canadian Government about the immigration of young poor women and girls to Canada from the gutters of urban centres and workhouses in Britain. For a decade she had been a leading advocate for improved employment opportunities for young women in Britain, and she was an early suffragette. In 1868, after testing the distant waters of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, she settled on the colony of Canada because it was much closer. So, in 1868 she brought young women in their 20s to be domestics in Canada. Although this was partially successful, she realized that the British Government saw the huge unresolved issue of young and teenage destitute, deserted and orphaned girls, who were unending generations of life givers by unscrupulous means, as a greater pressure on society. In 1869, Rye acquired the former courthouse & gaol in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) for a modest sum and converted it into 'Our Western Home'; and the first girls arrived there during that year. This was the first large mass transport of children to Canada and Rye was always considered by the Canadian Government as the leader in the Children Immigration field. With advertising and unsolicited requests for young domestics and farm workers, Rye's program was hugely successful, and the demand accelerated at an extraordinary rate. So much so that Annie Macpherson and many others quickly followed her example as the years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century passed by. Rye also acquired Avenue House in Peckham, Southwark, South London to channel her British homed children through to the administration at Our Western Home.

In 1874 the Doyle Report slammed Rye and Macpherson for their practices of child immigration without proper Government oversight and inadequate follow-up of those children placed in North America. Doyle, a Catholic, was especially damning of Rye, who was an evangelical Anglican. When one reviews the paperwork currently available for the children in the charge of Rye and Macpherson, the latter did a somewhat better job of her accounting reports while Rye felt that the children were in respectable hands. As we all know, teenagers can be rebellious teenagers, and some children, even in those days of more respect, religious instruction and controls, may have been dissatisfied with their new environment. The effect of the Doyle Report was that Rye stopped her emigration program in 1875 and 1876 to address the issues in the report; in 1877 when child immigration to Canada restarted, Rye made sure that all her own reports offered only children's initials and ages, and not their full names. This also applied to the person(s) who acted as the placement for each child. So, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a useful listing of Rye children is only possible by combining the ship's manifest information with Rye's reports.

A little over twenty years ago Gail Collins in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada and Chris Sanham in Henfield, West Sussex, England decided to try and find all of the records available that applied to Maria Rye and her children to make up a database, with Gail doing the period 1869 to 1879 and Chris doing 1880 to 1896. All went well until Chris became extremely frustrated with his dealings with Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and eventually withheld his portion of the database and refused to correspond with Gail, or anyone else as far as we know, for the last 8 years or so. Gail submitted her contribution to a (partial) Rye database to LAC several years ago and it has been included in the main Home Children database at LAC.

In parallel with the work of Gail Collins and Chris Sandham, Richard and Monica Taylor of the Niagara Historical Society collected most of the papers they could find on Maria S. Rye's children by extensive research in Canada and abroad. Starting more than a decade ago, they became exhausted from this considerable effort and their health failed. However, they left a treasure trove of uncompiled papers in the Museum's archives. It was these papers that were the starting point for this project.

Recognizing that all sources of Rye's children information were incomplete and lacking the compilation required for simple access to a research tool for descendants of Rye BHCs – including the LAC (RG17 file, etc.), Ontario Archives, BIFHSGO, University of Liverpool, Collins, Sandham and Taylor – the Compiler took a totally systematic approach to the collection of the Rye BHCs. The outcome is a .pdf file on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website, <https://www.notlmuseum.ca/research/british-home-children>

**The Scope** of the project was to create a SINGLE Excel spreadsheet with ALL known BHCs in chronological order in the charge of the Maria S. Rye organization from 1868 to 1896, and in the charge of the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society (CEWS) from 1897 to 1914 that were administered by the Our Western Home staff in NOTL. This was a statistical, or genealogical, project - and not a history project. At the conclusion of this, in understanding Rye and CEWS NOTL BHCs better, we now know specifically and in one document what BHC immigration information is still missing.

These two organizations brought about 5,300 Home Children to Canada, administered through Our Western Home in NOTL between 1868 and 1914. Unlike many other Canadian immigration organizations, the Rye organization focussed on the plight and well-being of young female immigrants between 1868 and 1896; and CEWS brought only girls to NOTL between 1896 and 1914 – CEWS boys were destined mostly for Sherbrooke, QC. Of the total, it is currently estimated that Miss Rye brought about 4,600 Home Children of which only 15% were boys; these boys arrived mostly in the 1870s.

The database on this NOTL Museum website is compiled from the sources described below. Two items are not taken from these sources but, rather, are the work of the Compiler: (i) the indexing and two identification colours in the left-hand column – green for Compiler-researched Married BHCs and orange for Single (or Unmarried) BHCs – and (ii) the marriage details for those Married BHCs who are identified in Green in the left column.

With few unknown exceptions, the following complete documents are in the Compiler's electronic backup document files, having been extracted and included in the new Rye BHC databases:

- (i) **Ship Manifests** for all Rye BHCs from 1868 to 1914. Prior to 1880 several shiploads of Rye BHCs to Halifax, NS and St. John, NB are partially unaccounted for. Unlike Quebec City, the Maritime ports did not retain their ships' records until 1881. It is believed that we have yet to account for about 200 Rye BHCs. It should be noted that all early BHC shiploads to Canada were accompanied by Rye herself. Later, Mrs. Hannah Soffe was the matron in charge for ship transportation for more than 25 Atlantic crossings. There were usually 2 voyages per year with about 100 BHCs.
- (ii) **Miss Rye's Annual Reports.**
- (iii) **Department of Agriculture** correspondence and reports regarding BHCs (some now missing).
- (iv) **Department of Agriculture** correspondence regarding Miss Rye.
- (v) Available **Rye BHC Letters.**
- (vi) **Government oversight records** (e.g., field reports) regarding Rye BHCs.
- (vii) Appropriate **Census records in NOTL and England.**
- (viii) **Boards of Guardian** and **Charity Commission reports.**
- (ix) **LAC's RG17 file.**
- (x) The **Collins Collection** at LAC, the **Kohli Collection** at University of Waterloo, and the **Taylor Collection** at the NOTL Museum.
- (xi) The **BIFHSGO file**, administered by Lynda Gibson.
- (xii) Special Collections & Archives, **University of Liverpool Library**, England.
- (xiii) **Heritage Canadiana** Collection of BHC documents.
- (xiv) Various secondary website documents, including Ancestry, myHeritage, etc.

See: <https://www.notlmuseum.ca/research/british-home-children>

In some cases, these BHCs did not set foot in NOTL but were sent directly to their placements in Eastern Canada. As far as is known, all those Rye BHCs that were placed in the United States came through Our Western Home in NOTL. At the outbreak of World War One the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society (CEWS) vacated Our Western Home in 1915 and the building was turned over to Niagara Camp for the housing of Polish Army officers until 1919. The building was demolished in 1923.

So, until the Niagara Historical Society published this new comprehensive Rye database on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website in late 2018, none of the material on any other website was close to complete and certainly not useful as a single comprehensive research tool for descendant family members. There have been many contributors to this project; the Compiler has simply prepared all their available data for the benefit of future researchers. Our NOTL Museum holds a collection of Rye BHC artifacts and materials.

## The BHC Life Events Project

Upon completion of the NOTL BHC Database project in late 2018, the Compiler started a follow-on project to understand the Life Events of as many NOTL BHCs as could be found using available Ancestry.ca family trees and documents. The benefits of Ancestry to this project are: (i) it is the most comprehensive online genealogical database available; (ii) for Ancestry subscribers it enables the researcher to know and communicate with each of the family tree submitters (typically descendant family members) to their database; (iii) some submitters have provided photographs and images of their BHCs, grave markers, etc. Using more sources would have extended the project by several more years.

The Rye organization [Rye] brought Home Children to Canada from 1868 to 1896, administered through 'Our Western Home' in Niagara-on-the-Lake [NOTL]. The Church of England Waifs & Strays Society [CEWS], who were already bringing Home Children to such places as Sherbrooke, QC, acquired the Rye Home in NOTL in 1896 and brought their girls through this Home from 1897 until 1914. Our Western Home in NOTL discontinued use as an administration, lodging and training site for Home Children in the early part of World War One.

**The Scope** of this BHC Life Events Project is to provide salient details of the lives of over 20% of these NOTL Home Children, using the Ancestry database as the primary source of genealogical detail. These BHC life events include: age at arrival by ship from Liverpool, England to Canada (Quebec City, Montreal or Halifax - or Portland, ME, USA), marriage date and place, name of spouse, age at birth of first child, number of children, age at death, husband's occupation, spouse's birth place, and place/country where the BHC's family resided.

The original database, published in late 2018, addresses what is known of the lives of BHCs for a period of about 3 months immediately before and after their voyage from Britain to Canada; so, that database does not offer insight into the lives of these Home Children – other than the addition of some marriage details offered by the Compiler.

The Compiler has now identified the subsequent lives of 1200 married and 192 unmarried BHC immigrants who immigrated to Canada between 1868 and 1914 and were administered through Our Western Home, NOTL. Of these married BHCs, 13% had no known children and 9.5% were boys. The Compiler has also accumulated an archive of almost 200 personal photographs of BHCs in addition to many grave marker photographs.

To the Compiler's knowledge, this is the first time that research into the life events of a multi-thousand group of BHCs has been conducted. The idea for this Life Events project is therefore novel. The results suggest that the selection of life event categories is achievable for a large BHC study project; the "age at death" life event had the most unknowns, 4%.

The Compiler retains research folders for each BHC, including communication with current descendants and relations; these will ultimately be received into the NOTL Museum's Archives. To this end, the Compiler continues to seek family involvement in discovering more about (i)

the descendants of Rye and CEWS BHCs who were administered through Our Western Home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and (ii) any other sources not described above.

To date, there have been a few books written about the negative experiences of some BHC teenagers in their placements around North America in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century. This has led to a distorted perspective of the experiences of most BHCs and their placements, many of which were full adoptions. Today it is hard to recognize life before the introduction of the Welfare State in Britain in the late 1940s and in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. It is also hard for us to recognize life before electricity, women's suffrage and, later, agricultural automation. Times before World War Two were much harder than they are today.

Raising young children and teenagers has typically never been an easy challenge for parents, foster parents, adopting parents or guardians. Formal, government-recorded adoptions did not start until the 1930s. So, the purpose of this project is to explore the lives of BHCs after they had become satisfied with, or escaped, their indentures by whatever means. As a focus, the project investigates those who married – and some who remained domestics and did not. Whether married or single, people in the 19th century and early 20th century were much more subject to diseases and malnutrition, quite unlike Canada today. And the bodies of poor and destitute youngsters in Britain more than a century ago had conditions that often lingered with them forever and their death certificates supported this observation.

To avoid confusion with other contemporary Homes for indigenous children in Canada, Our Western Home was a short stay, staffed temporary shelter for children arriving in Canada by ship and awaiting a quick placement with Canadian (or U.S.) foster and adopting parents in homes and farms. For most of the Rye and CEWS NOTL BHCs, these placements were in Southern Ontario, Canada; however, some were placed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or Quebec. In contrast, the Homes for the “education” of indigenous children in Canada more than century ago were residential.

## **Your Own Research:**

Many people, when contacted these days, are unaware of their relationship to a British Home Child (BHC). Many BHCs are therefore being rediscovered in this age of the Internet, genealogical services and DNA testing. Photographs of BHCs are often hard to find, if they exist at all. Correspondence is even harder to find, because the literacy of these people – especially in their early years - was generally modest. It is hard for us to recognize that all these BHCs were from very poor homes, and very few BHCs had more than 3 years of formal education.

If you are interested in conducting research on any BHC who passed through NOTL – or any other BHC through another agency such as Dr. Barnardo's, Fegan Homes, Quarrier's, Marchmont Homes, Middlemore, Catholic Charities, Church of England Waifs & Strays in Quebec, etc. – the two most comprehensive sites are Library & Archives Canada (mostly microfilm) and Ancestry (online subscription service). There are numerous other Internet sites

which describe information on BHCs in Canada. Almost all the detailed information about BHCs is in the reports prepared by the Home they passed through. Note that Our Western Home in NOTL placed mostly girls (about 85% of the children administered).

Of course, your best resource for information on a relative who was a BHC is often your own family – maybe not you, but perhaps one of your siblings or cousins. If you are really starting from scratch and have no possibility of assistance from your family, then you may have to seek assistance from a knowledgeable and experienced researcher. You may also go the NOTL Library with your computer and connect to the Ancestry database at no charge. Your own local Public Library may also have this customer benefit.

### **The Compiler's Contact Details:**

The Compiler of the database cited above, and on the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum website is:  
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